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Second Thoughts on Cuba

The possibility of what might have been in Cuba had the United States acted differently in dealing with the Batista regime and the budding Castro revolution is explored in a new book by our former ambassador to Cuba, Earl Smith. But while Smith's criticism of State Department confusion and differing decisions has considerable merit, there is no guarantee that the way he advocated would have been much happier.

Smith was ambassador to Cuba for the Eisenhower Administration and advocated firm support of Batista as the revolution grew. Certainly he did not mean that he agreed with Batista's dictatorial regime. Apparently he felt that with a little more time Batista could have been convinced of the necessity for relinquishing his iron control. In fact there was a reasonably open election held in 1958 with the election as president of Aguerro. But whether Aguerro would have been a yes man for his friend Batista was never tested because Castro took over and Batista fled before Aguerro could take office.

Smith heavily criticizes William Wieland, Roy Rubottom and the CIA, all residents of *The Fourth Floor* of the State Department. He charges that they either knew or should have known that Castro was a Communist and that they were responsible for the withdrawal of military arms shipments to Batista in the spring of 1958.

But what is really the matter of controversy here is exactly what the attitude of our State Department and representatives to other governments should be. Ambassadors are official representatives of our government to another. Does this mean a responsibility to the regime in power in the host country? Smith apparently believes that it does. But our State Department activities in many countries over many years indicate otherwise.

Certainly it is unrealistic to suggest that an ambassador to a country should support a revolutionary group seeking the overthrow of the regime in control whatever the excesses of the people in power. But our policy of non-recognition of regimes with which we have serious—or political—disagreement is an obvious attempt to manipulate or even to dictate the government of another country. I may be argued that

government holds power by brutal force; but we cannot deny that it is nevertheless attempting manipulation.

But as long as we are going to attempt such interference Smith tellingly points out that our responsibility is heavy. "If the policy of the United States is to bring about the overthrow of dictators in the hope that democracy will follow, then I believe that the United States must be prepared to take whatever steps are necessary to preserve law and order and prevent chaos during the interim period of transition which may last a long time. If free and open elections are to be held in these nations when a dictator is overthrown, a provisional government must be formed and such government needs outside support to maintain law and order. To do otherwise leaves a vacuum in which the Communists gain control. Such a vacuum did occur in Cuba."

But Smith here overlooks that this type of dictator overthrow has been going on for generations in many Latin American nations especially. The ruthless clawing to power and the administering of absolute power by the supposed savior of the people have not been merely phenomena of the Communist lust for power. Dictators, like Batista for instance, have been just as vicious and unjust when their aim was personal power rather than the triumph of the socialist revolution. The difference in recent years has been the ability of the Communists to exploit this personal drive for their own purposes. It is quite likely that this is what happened in the case of Cuba.

Afterthoughts like Smith's book following disasters draw their own controversies. Adolf Berle Jr., a former assistant Secretary of State, in reviewing *The Fourth Floor* says that Smith is "desperately unjust to Rubottom, Wieland and the C.I.A." These groups, while not knowing whether Castro was a Communist "were convinced he was a hopeless megalomaniac-psycho-path." But Berle concedes that there is something chaotic about the State Department's massive bureaucracy that needs serious attention.

One thing needing review should certainly be the extent of its efforts to fashion the world after our own image. If we are bound to do so, the responsibility doesn't end when one dictator is tossed out of a